

TikTok 'Slugging' trend has people coating their faces with grease

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To slug or not to slug? That's the question for millions of TikTok users,

who turn to the social media giant for tips and information on what amounts to a DIY [skin care](#) phenomenon.

[Slugging](#) involves slathering some sort of sealing agent—like Vaseline or another petroleum-based ointment—onto the skin.

What's the problem with that? New research warns that the majority of TikTok posts focused on the wrinkle-reducing practice are medically unreliable, hyping the benefits while downplaying the risks.

The goal of slugging, explained study lead author Kyla Pagani, is "to help moisturize and strengthen the skin barrier," for those battling dryness, irritation or inflammation.

The idea is not medically unsound, stressed Pagani, who conducted her research while a [medical student](#) in the Department of Dermatology at the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston.

"I've heard some dermatologists speak very highly about it, most often for addressing [eczema](#) on the hands," she added. "It definitely does have benefits."

But it also has potential downsides, said Pagani, such as boosting the odds for acne. And with [social media sites](#) like TikTok exerting such a "strong influence on the younger population," she and her colleagues wanted to see if that platform's more than 1 billion users are likely to get the full picture of what slugging really involves.

To do that, the study team analyzed the content found in the top 49 English-language TikTok videos on slugging. When the investigation was launched, those posts had collectively amassed more than 26.5 million views and nearly 3.3 million "likes."

But in the end, only 37% of the videos were classified by investigators as educational. That meant that they offered a reasonably full discussion of both the potential pros of slugging—such as smoother and more hydrated skin—and the potential cons, including the blocking of skin pores and [acne](#).

The posting sources mattered a lot. For example, the team found that nearly 88% of videos uploaded by [health care providers](#) were found to be educational and balanced. But that figure plummeted to just only about 43% for posts shared by "influencers" focused on beauty.

Overall, the study authors found that about 6 in 10 posts highlighted only the upside of slugging, while only 2 in 10 mentioned possible risks.

"What we found was not necessarily misinformation, but often a lack of [information](#)," Pagani said. "A lot of the time, there was just no inclusion of risks."

Beyond a heightened risk for facial acne among acne-prone patients, Pagani said there is also the risk that any topical skin medication applied before slugging would essentially become trapped underneath petroleum ointments, and therefore potentially absorbed more deeply—and for longer periods of time—than originally intended.

"Now, slugging is one of the relatively harmless things that can be found on TikTok," Pagani acknowledged. "But even in the case of mostly benign beauty trends, the hope is that viewers are going to get [accurate information](#) from reliable sources, information backed by science based on data and research. Because other trends or beauty products may certainly be more potentially harmful than something like slugging."

The findings were published recently in the journal [Clinics in Dermatology](#).

It's that broader issue that concerns Kelly Garrett, director of the School of Communication at Ohio State University.

"It is no wonder that people end up looking for health information in these digital spaces," said Garrett, who pointed out that social media is familiar, easy to use and can be an empowering way to do research.

And [medical professionals](#) are not the sole purveyors of useful health information. "For example, someone who is living with a [cancer diagnosis](#) can have important insights, too," Garrett said.

But the problem, he noted, is that "on social media, content creators' goals are not always obvious.

"Posts by health care providers are often intended to inform, but other creators may be more interested in providing entertainment, persuading consumers to buy something, or just generating traffic to their content," Garrett said. "Consumers who misunderstand the creators' goals can end up being misled about the content, too."

All of which means it's critical that social media users be aware of the risks involved when searching for health information online, said Garrett, who was not involved in the study.

"[Information literacy](#)" is what it's all about, he noted, meaning that those who turn to [social media](#) for [health information](#) know that they have to distinguish "between those making a good faith effort to help others navigate complex [health](#) issues and those who are more concerned about getting attention than about being right."

More information: There's more on slugging at the [Cleveland Clinic](#).

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